

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Interview with **SYBIL HAMMOND**
Conducted by **RICHARD MAULSBY**

Sybil Hammond was Scheduler in the 1978 Barry Campaign and then served in the Mayor's Office as Appointments Secretary and later as liaison to civic organizations and constituent groups. From 1984-8, she was Director of the Office of Constituent Service and later was Assistant Supervisor of the Office of Banking and Financial Institutions, where she worked to ensure compliance with the federal Community Reinvestment Act. Sybil retired from DC government in 2015 as a senior official in the Department of Public Works.

Date of Interview: August 22, 2015

INTERVIEWER: Okay. We can begin. If you would tell us your first and last name, and please spell it for us, Sybil.

SYBIL HAMMOND: Sybil Hammond. S-Y-B as in boy-I-L H-a-m-m-o-n-d.

INTERVIEWER: Great. Sybil, to start with, just tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from, where did you go to school, how was it you came to Washington, that kind of stuff.

SYBIL HAMMOND: Okay. I was actually born in Newark, New Jersey, but I was raised in Richmond, Virginia. We moved to Richmond when I was about 2. My father was in the Army and my mother and I, and then my youngest sister lived with her dad until my father got out of the service. So, I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, which is just 100 miles down the road from D.C. I went to college in Massachusetts. I went to Mount Holyoke College in western Massachusetts. After I left school I came to D.C. I had majored in international relations and politics. I came here to start working at the State Department and realized that was not a good fit.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

SYBIL HAMMOND: '72. And I stayed at the State Department for a little bit less than a year and then had a couple of odd jobs. One of the most fun jobs was, Amtrak was new so three-quarters to a half of the porters and whatnot who were working for the railroad were eligible for retirement, and so Amtrak was supposed to attract passengers back to the rail service and they hired women to work on the trains for the first time, and young people, who were not unionized, so they proceeded to abuse us until we got organized. But that was a fun job, on the Montrealer, between here and Montreal. So, that was fun because I like trains.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in politics growing up, in college, or when you first came to D.C.?

SYBIL HAMMOND: In college I was. I went to college in '68, so, you know, the late '60s, mid '60s. But when I got there there was still activism in the '70s, and I did my usual chaining doors shut and organizing takeovers in college.

[Laughter.]

SYBIL HAMMOND: Demonstrations—

INTERVIEWER: Teach-ins—

SYBIL HAMMOND: —anti-war stuff, teach-ins, sit-ins, march-ins.

INTERVIEWER: Did you come to Washington to demonstrate?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I did not but when I got to Washington I ended up joining an organization called SOBU—Student Organization of Black Unity, I think it was called—and that group was organizing against D.C. Transit, the green and white L. Roy Chalk-owned buses in D.C. There was a bus strike and I worked—I think that was the year that we worked with that organization and worked on the strike for buses—organizing rides for people downtown and encouraging people not to take the buses, because the citizens of D.C. felt that old, raggedy, un-air-conditioned buses were assigned to predominantly black and non-white areas of town and the air-conditioned buses ran on Wisconsin Avenue. I had just gotten here, but that's what we were told. Hopefully I have the summers right.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you living then?

SYBIL HAMMOND: On Capitol Hill in a group house, of course, with other students.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have air-conditioned buses there?

SYBIL HAMMOND: [Laughs.]

INTERVIEWER: Capitol Hill, maybe you did.

SYBIL HAMMOND: I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: When did you meet Marion Barry?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I ended up working on Marion Barry's Council campaign—

INTERVIEWER: In '74?

SYBIL HAMMOND: —because I knew Ivanhoe Donaldson [Barry's Chief of Staff on the City Council and later his 1978 campaign manager], and I was literally walking down the street one day and I heard, "Hammond. Hammond," and there was Ivanhoe, "What are you doing this summer?" And I was working on a job that ran concurrent with the school [year]. It was a "city as your classroom" kind of a thing, where high school kids came to D.C. and we took them

around D.C. and did units on the different branches of government. But we were off in the summer. So, Ivanhoe said, "A friend of mine is running for Council. Can I get some help?" And I said, "Sure." So, he gave me the address, told me to show up at the campaign office, and I worked on the Council campaign, and then went back to the job that I had after that Council campaign.

INTERVIEWER: How had you met Ivanhoe Donaldson?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Ivanhoe taught some courses at the University of Massachusetts and I was in that Connecticut Valley, in the consortium of seven universities, and we could take classes there. So, I audited a couple of courses. I think I took his class on comparative revolutions or something, so it was Mao and Che and Castro.

INTERVIEWER: How was he as a teacher?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Oh, he was a pretty good teacher. He was a pretty good teacher. There was a cadre of people who taught black history and, you know, other courses like [comparing] revolutions on the [?] here, that kind of thing. There was a whole group. But they taught revolutionary poetry writing and that kind of thing and Ivanhoe was part of that group. I think Acklyn Lynch is in this area. I don't know if you know Acklyn. Jair Lynch, his son, was a silver medalist in, I forget which Olympics, but the first black male gymnastic silver medalist. Anyway, Acklyn was on that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get a good grade in the course?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I audited that course so it was a pass/fail, and I passed. So, that's how I knew Ivanhoe.

INTERVIEWER: But when you came to Washington had you been in touch with him, or was this the first time you—

SYBIL HAMMOND: I mean, I guess we were in touch as in through people and talking to people who talk to people, that kind of thing. But when he asked me to work on the campaign I literally was just walking down the street and he was driving by, pulled over, and recruited me. So, when it was time for Marion to run for mayor I had been bitten by the campaign bug.

INTERVIEWER: But this is '74, the first home rule election for the Council. What did you do in the campaign?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Odds and ends, from putting up posters to taking notes at Meet the Candidates, and just whatever kinds of assignments came about.

INTERVIEWER: Did you interact a lot with Marion?

SYBIL HAMMOND: A little bit. The campaign was very small. The campaign staff was very small. He was in the office pretty much every day. We had a lot of access to him. And I think

that group was Audrey Rowe, Pat Selden, Sandra Hill, Steve Klein. It was just a small group. I remember us working in a room and opening the mail up, and holding the envelopes up to see if there was a check in there, to get money, so that was funny.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first impression of him when you met him? Did he stand out?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Easy-going, easy to talk to, didn't seem like someone who could move mountains until you watched him a little bit. I do remember a kind of funny story. I have an aunt who lives here, who turned 91 this year, and called my parents and told them that I had just gotten to D.C., I hadn't been here a minute, and I managed to meet the trouble-making, rabble-rousing, dashiki-wearing person who was always in the news, who was upsetting people. So, my mother was, "I can't believe you went to D.C. and you have to go find the person who is," you know... babble, babble, babble.

INTERVIEWER: And you weren't being paid, right? Were you just volunteering?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I got paid every now and then. I remember having to go to the dentist to have something done, and the campaign gave me \$60 to go to the dentist, because we weren't getting paid much. You know, \$15 here and there to buy lunch or whatever.

INTERVIEWER: And your parents have actually met Marion?

SYBIL HAMMOND: My mother met him the first mayoral campaign and was charmed ever since then, the first mayoral inauguration.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SYBIL HAMMOND: Right. She came up for the inaugural.

INTERVIEWER: During that first campaign, was there any talk that you heard, or part of, that this is sort of the first step in something bigger that he might be doing? In '74, was he already talking about running for mayor?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I know that Ivanhoe and probably Marion were talking about the fact that this was not going to be an end step for him, that he would probably go on to other things. Nothing concrete. It was just sort of understood that this was somebody who was on the move.

INTERVIEWER: So after he wins the election, of course, he got one of the short straws and had to run again in 2 years. What did you do after the election?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I went back to Close Up, the job that I had. After the campaign, I went back to the government studies program that I worked on, from October to May or June.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get involved in the '76 campaign, when he was running for re-election? You were working.

SYBIL HAMMOND: I don't remember. I do not remember. I'm sorry. I'd have to check my notes.

INTERVIEWER: Well, skipping along, it's 1978. When did you get involved in the 1978 campaign? How did that all come about?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I guess at its beginning, that summer. I know when the campaign stood up, when there was an office and started hiring people, that's my earliest memory of being involved in the campaign.

INTERVIEWER: Not until the summer of '78?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Whenever the campaign kicked off, Richard.

BETTY KING: I went to work at the beginning of February at the office down across the street from the District Building. In early February, there was an office, before we moved to the Miller Fur Store. I don't remember if you were there or not.

SYBIL HAMMOND: I only remember the Miller Furs location.

BETTY KING: Okay. We moved to Miller Furs later in the spring, maybe as early as March. I'm not sure.

SYBIL HAMMOND: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: So how was it you came to work on the campaign? Whenever you started to work, in '78, did Ivanhoe contact you again, or did you just volunteer, or what happened?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Let's see. By the time I started working on the '78 campaign, at that time I was working on the Council staff.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So, at some point you went to work for Marion Barry, on his Council staff. And what did you do on the Council staff?

SYBIL HAMMOND: He was [Chairman] on the Finance and Revenue Committee and I worked on that staff down in the basement of the District Building, and I left that job and went to the campaign, but I don't remember exactly when. But I left the government and went to work on the '78 campaign.

INTERVIEWER: So you were a paid staffer in the campaign?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What were your main responsibilities?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Scheduling. I was responsible for, yeah, just scheduling the candidate at different activities. Then, we started to have sort of an advance team, I guess, if you will, and a

driver, and I remember also working to schedule to make sure that there was someone to drive him to events, because it wasn't working to have him get there himself and leave places, as the schedule started getting busier.

INTERVIEWER: Had you ever done anything like that before?

SYBIL HAMMOND: No, I had not.

INTERVIEWER: How did you like it?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Well, as you can imagine, scheduling Marion, it was exciting. Some of it was hair pulling out, to make sure that he adhered to the schedule. But I'm not sure how I ended up there. I think Ivanhoe just decided I could do that, and so I did. You know, if Ivanhoe told you do something then that's what you did, right?

INTERVIEWER: You worked, what, 7 days a week?

SYBIL HAMMOND: At least 6 days. Probably 6-1/2, I'm sure.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit about the atmosphere. You had a store-front campaign, there in the old retail core. What was it like? What was the atmosphere like?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Well, people were young and enthusiastic and I think there was a sense of excitement. And probably campaigns have this in common—the troops are working and pulling together towards an end. I can't really describe it but there's just an excitement at working towards a common goal, and you feel like this is your contribution to society, the city where you live, the town, the state, or the country where you live. You know, you feel like you're making some sort of a contribution to humanity by working to support someone who espouses the same kind of ideals that you hold yourself.

I mean, the people were interesting and we were all young and it was just fascinating. There was this, "Let's just go get them. We can do anything," kind of. I mentioned to you, and I'll have to check with Kwame, but I remember recruiting Kwame to drive Marion Barry—

INTERVIEWER: Kwame Holman.

SYBIL HAMMOND: —Kwame Holman—from one place to another, and I think that's how he got involved. I also remember, with Jamie Raskin, who was in high school, I believe, still, and there were some young kids who were probably the children of people who were supporters, who were interested in politics and in campaigning. And I had some responsibility for making sure that they had stuff to do. So, these kids were putting up posters and filing stuff and whatever came up. But those two kind of stand out. Jamie is now a State Senator and running for the U.S. Senate in Maryland, so I like to think that his little early interest in politics, this was probably his first campaign that he got a chance to work on. It would be interesting to talk to him.

Kwame Holman was trying to figure out what to do next. He was interested in communications. I guess he didn't have a job—I can't remember at that point—but he was eager to drive and work on the campaign.

INTERVIEWER: How had you met him?

SYBIL HAMMOND: It's a small-world story. Kwame Holman's older brother and Hampton, my husband, went to college together. We all met in college. We were in college in New England, so we met at the mixers and parties and that kind of thing. Kwame's older sister, Kwasi's younger sister—I think she's between the two of them—went to the same college I went to, so we had some connections. I don't remember. I can't remember. Maybe Kwasi asked me if I had any advice for Kwame. I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: When you look back on that campaign, think of that intense period of time over the summer months, what events stand out in your mind, things that you always remember, things that you felt were maybe turning points in the campaign or real factors in the eventual outcome?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Well, a couple of things. The schedule started to be packed because Marion was in demand all over the place, and that was part of the challenge with keeping him on schedule because there was this interest in the various communities that had adopted him as their darling, and there was interest in the campaign. So, there was always this energy in trying to get him from place to place. This was [City Council Chairman] Sterling Tucker, Marion, and—

INTERVIEWER: [DC Mayor] Walter Washington.

SYBIL HAMMOND: —and Walter Washington, and you have to help me. There was a meeting that we used to refer to as—I can't remember what—

INTERVIEWER: The midnight meeting? [the meeting David Eaton tried to put together a scheme to get Marion to withdraw and support Sterling]

SYBIL HAMMOND: Right, the midnight meeting on Friday. I kind of remember that. I have to think a minute to see if there's some other events that come to mind that really stick out. I can't think of anything right now.

INTERVIEWER: At what point did you feel, or did you ever feel that "we're going to win this. Marion's going to win"?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I wish I could tell you the day, but I do remember being in this campaign office, and I can't remember after which particular event or something that happened, but I remember just saying to myself, "He's going to win this thing. We're going to win." I can't pinpoint exactly when that was. I will say to you that I wasn't convinced when the campaign started but at some point it just clicked and then I was certain that this group—because this

was an A team, a crack team that had come together, and it just felt like we were going to win this thing.

INTERVIEWER: If you look back on it now, and other highlights of your life, where does this campaign stand in that?

SYBIL HAMMOND: This particular campaign, this first [Barry] mayoral campaign? It's one of those life events that if I were to write a diary or a book or do a graph or a timeline of something, this was an important event. I don't think that the feeling of excitement and purpose—I don't think I've experienced it quite like that at any other time. I will say that there are some relationships and friendships that were forged during that time that endure until right now, even with people that I don't see every week or talk to frequently. It's valuable to me and it's, I don't know, comforting, and it's a treasure that I can see any one of these people after having not spoken to them for 6 or 8 months, and just sit down and pick up and start talking.

If you define friendship as people you talk with every week or talk frequently with—I don't define friendship like that. I define it as there's some sort of a link, and it spans time, and you can pick up where you left off, even after big gaps. You know, I really treasure a lot of the relationships and friendships that I forged during that time.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do on Election Day?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I was probably working.

INTERVIEWER: You did vote?

SYBIL HAMMOND: Yes, I did vote. I know I did that. I don't know. I know we were all working. We were usually too tired to join into much of the celebrations because you were bone-tired, exhausted, mentally and physically, from whatever tasks you were involved in during that day. I can't tell you specifically what it was. I don't know. Phone-banking. I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: What was election night like?

SYBIL HAMMOND: A blur. Excitement. Just a blur. Just a blur. Happy faces. Weary, tired, triumphant faces.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. How did your life change after the election, during the general election campaign and into the transition? What was it like then? Did you continue to do the same things you were doing?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I worked on the transition, and then I started working in government, in Marion's office. Scheduling?

BETTY KING: Doing scheduling.

SYBIL HAMMOND: Scheduling, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And I'm sure that he had a lot more friends after the election.

SYBIL HAMMOND: Yes, he did, and a lot more demands. That first term, really, the volume of requests for meetings, invitations for events, from everywhere, from every senior citizen's 85th birthday party, to the births of children, to big events at churches, to the Pigskin Club, to arrival ceremonies at the White House. I mean, it just ran the gamut of all kinds of events to which he got invitations.

I remember, somehow, there was an event at Pamela [Mrs. Averell] Harriman's house, and I can't remember whether there was something that she did for the campaign or that he was just invited to something. I can't remember. But I can remember all of these names that I'd read in the paper, of folks in the Green Book—was it called?—that list of what was, I guess, for Washington, D.C., high society, a list of people's wintertime addresses and summertime. You know, some of those folks, I went, in a working capacity. I accompanied him to some of those events, once he became mayor. I also became a regular at the Kennedy Center because there was box there for the mayor. You know, all kinds of things.

INTERVIEWER: As you look back on it now, how do you think the city is different because of the fact that Marion Barry won that election, as opposed to Sterling Tucker or Walter Washington? What was the difference in the fact that Marion Barry was the winner?

SYBIL HAMMOND: I think some of the ideas, although they often did not come to fruition during Marion's first or second, or maybe even third term. You know, he always talked about a living downtown, bringing development into the core of downtown, which, like many urban areas during the '70s and '80s, was in decline. People were moving out, buildings were empty. You couldn't attract businesses into the town. He laid the groundwork for a lot of that. 14th and U, for instance, is a good example. That's a vibrant area right now. 14th Street had been scarred, and I think U Street in that area, by the riots of '68. There were boarded-up storefronts and just little rinky-dink businesses along there. It was a neighborhood that you didn't want to be caught in after dark because it was the province of drug dealers and prostitutes and that kind of thing.

Marion had a vision for revitalizing the riot-scarred corridors. That Reeves Building, which was, and may still be, in danger of being part of an economic development thrust by the current administration, some sort of a land swap, that was an anchor for that area, and Marion Barry pushed to have that municipal center located at that intersection and dragged government workers, for the most part, kicking and screaming to 14th and U, because it was a wasteland and there was no parking and there were no restaurants or places to go to pick up a sandwich. And by the time the building was finished and ready for occupation, even some of the government entities that had fought going into that building really wanted to go to 14th and U.

So, you look at that area now and it's vibrant. The streets are crowded. There's restaurants at every corner. There's still a lot of construction going on in that area. It's like what Georgetown used to be, has moved to 14th and U. And I think that Marion Barry should get a lot of credit for that. It took years, but that was his vision.

He also, as I recall, had a fondness for the arts community, and I remember discussions about making 14th or 17th Street, that there needed to be an area downtown for theaters. And now I'm trying to remember the name of some....Source [Theatre]. There was some discussion about Woolly Mammoth, Studio Theater. That sort of got off the ground. So, there are a couple of little theaters downtown now but there's no Theater Row. Shakespeare—

INTERVIEWER: The Folger Shakespeare—

SYBIL HAMMOND: —is now on 7th Street. You know, they're downtown. There's no corridor, but there is a vibrant scene of small theaters downtown. So, again, some of the ideas may not have come fully to fruition but I think that he and his administration, the crack team that he attracted to come work for, run this city, should get some credit for that.

Also, there's a little difference, and maybe this is just evolution. I still work for the district government, and comparing the old years to now, I don't see the same kind of dedication on the staff and people who were attracted to work for the city. It's just a job. And I'm not saying this is good or bad. It's a way-station for a couple of years, to get some experience to flesh out your resume, to hop onto the next opportunity. There is no sort of dedication or feeling that people are a part of the town, or that they want to put down roots here and stay for a little while, or that they care past a 4-year increment of time what happens in D.C. That's my perspective, because I am part of the older generation now. I never thought I would be, but it came to fruition. But I just see a difference and I don't see the same kind of dedication. It's a job and there's no sort of sense of responsibility to the residents of this town. Again, this is just my perspective.